

# FES PROJECT OVERVIEW: ENVISIONING A POST-2014 AFGHANISTAN\*

*The future of Afghanistan and the future of its region are interdependent. A secure Afghanistan is crucial to establishing a secure region. In turn, Afghanistan's direct and regional neighbors have a responsibility to support its transition toward political stability, security, peace, and economic development. This excerpt of the "Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability" that will be published as of 17 November 2013, has been prepared by a regional expert group convened by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) to underscore past achievements and to offer recommendations to policy stakeholders for a responsible role in Afghanistan's Decade of Transformation.*



\* "Envisioning a Secure and Independent Afghanistan Post 2014 – Perspectives and Strategies for Constructive Conflict Resolution from the Neighborhood," *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*, The full policy paper can be accessed at: <http://www.fes.de/cgi-bin/gbv.cgi?id=10307&ty=pdf>

**T**he planned withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan, to be completed by the end of 2014, presents an opportunity for Afghanistan's direct and regional neighbors to strengthen their roles in securing the future of Afghanistan. A peaceful stabilization of the conflict in Afghanistan is a key to securing its fragile region from current and future threats. This article argues that this process has to be based on constructive regional cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors, with the key objective being the transformation of Afghanistan into an asset for its own population and its region more broadly.

This position marks a shift from more traditional perspectives on the restive region in two fundamental ways. Firstly, it recognizes that the region and the respective perspectives of its neighbors are becoming increasingly relevant for the long-term stability and sustainability of Afghanistan and the region itself. Secondly, it suggests a new working relationship between Afghanistan and the region.

The international community, after a decade of engagement in Afghanistan, honored this revised perspective with the establishment of the Istanbul Process in November 2011. The process presents an opportunity for the region to strengthen its role in securing Afghanistan's future, thereby supporting that of its own. To date, however, this has remained a rather lifeless Track I exercise.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a German non-profit political foundation, felt that it was timely to add a regional Track II initiative to strengthen the ties of regional cooperation, as well as to build trust between key figures in both Afghanistan and the region. Entitled "Envisioning a Secure and Independent Afghanistan Post-2014: Perspectives and Strategies for Constructive Conflict Resolution from the Neighborhood", the initiative began in 2012. Through this work, FES has aimed to facilitate national and regional discussions to shape policy recommendations geared at supporting a peaceful and prosperous decade of transition for Afghanistan and the region.

Four Policy Groups were established, composed of a total of 60 regional experts based in Afghanistan, Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), India, and Pakistan. Each Policy Group is composed of former and serving ambassadors, senior civil servants, military generals, parliamentarians, civil society leaders, analysts, and journalists who bear in mind the strategic interests of their respective countries while deliberating on mutually beneficial commitments and obligations. The Policy Groups engage with each other as well as in inter-regional Track II dialogues, with valuable inputs from experts in Turkey, China, Iran, and Russia.

One output of the joint deliberations of these regional experts is the “Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Security”, which put forth the following key policy recommendations:

**At the National Level:** Build credible national consensus among state agencies, legitimate political opposition, and civil society to agree on a non-partisan, inclusive national action plan, so as to bring visible reduction in organized corruption; urgently develop a convincing economic transition blueprint; reconcile differing Afghan positions on the peace process; conduct credible, inclusive, and transparent presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2015 respectively; streamline the various bilateral and multilateral forums with capable Afghan coordinating and steering roles at non-partisan levels; introduce pro-active regional diplomacy; improve governance; and make Afghanistan a safe and livable place for its citizens.

**At the Regional Level:** Exert concerted regional efforts as endorsed by the Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) to address the multifaceted challenges faced by the country; pursue regional commitments to fight terrorism, extremism, and militancy in all forms and manifestations; undertake effective and result-oriented regional, inter-regional, and international cooperation to reduce demand and counter the production, processing, and trafficking of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals; emphasize the need to establish a permanent national-level multidisciplinary Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Experts Working Group with a joint secretariat to determine the root causes of trust deficit and devise lasting solutions; organize trilateral talks between Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan; support India-Iran cooperation and common interests in Afghanistan; deepen joint efforts by the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan; organize a three-way Afghan-Sino-Pak dialogue on Afghanistan; and encourage inter-regional and people-to-people contacts and exchanges in all sectors of society.

**At the International Level:** Call on the United States of America (U.S.) and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to take confidence building measures to reassure the regional countries that their long-term presence in Afghanistan is exclusively to empower the Afghan people and that they espouse no other motives; emphasize that resolving Iran-U.S. standoff would help Afghan-Iran bilateral relations; pursue the planned transformation of the NATO-led ISAF role in Afghanistan to train, advise, and assist the Afghanistan National Security Force (ANSF), while determining (1) its time-specific post-2014 role with sustained aid for civilian sectors based on the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (Tokyo Framework) and (2) visible reduction in organized corruption; enable the ANSF to defend the constitutional order, provide security, and prevent a possible return of terrorist and

extremist groups like Al Qaeda; promote development and economic growth; and encourage Pakistan to sincerely pursue cross-border threats.

It is the project's Afghanistan Policy Group's (APG) explicit long-term recommendation to develop the Goal of Neutrality. During the Decade of Transformation and on all three levels, they recommend pursuing an Afghan-led and Afghanistan-specific neutrality that seeks codification by neighboring and regional countries, and parallel or sequential codification by global powers and the United Nations.

They believe that Afghan neutrality –that is, an enduring neutrality– would be the best platform for regional stability. Outside powers must engage in multilateral negotiations that result in a guarantee of the political independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. The agreement will thwart an intervention by any one of them, because they will monitor or police each other. It will provide Afghanistan with the appropriate political and legal framework to appeal to the international community, were there to be any infringement or violation of the agreement. In the process, regional and global powers' counterchecking efforts will discourage any meddling in Afghan affairs.

“Enduring Neutrality” would provide a logical, promising framework for the ongoing Istanbul Process, the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the Heart of Asia dialogue, with specific confidence-building measures tailored to support the “Enduring Neutrality” for Afghanistan. It is an idea that can draw a consensus among the major powers, because it would represent all of their fundamental interests – as well as those of Afghanistan. In sum, it can put an end to impromptu policymaking and chain reactions of actions, while generating regional security, integration, and prosperity. With this neutrality, Afghanistan can shift from being a bottleneck to a land-linking facilitator of trade and a transit hub along the Eurasian, Middle Eastern, South Asian, East Asian, and Central Asian corridors.

The APG further recommends that the established enduring neutrality must be guaranteed by the United Nations Security Council on behalf of the international community, with enforcement mechanisms in accordance with the UN Charter that entails binding obligations as well as retributive measures. They emphasize that in the process, Afghanistan must declare that its neutrality be codified by neighboring, near-neighboring, and regional countries as well as secure parallel or sequential codification by global powers and the UN.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The APG paper, “Enduring Neutrality” will be available on 17 November 2013 in Kabul, <http://fes-afghanistan.org/>

The recommendations made in the Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability can be classified under four major programs: (1) Afghan National Transition Strategy, including a non-partisan and inclusive national action plan; (2) Regional Initiatives and Activities; (3) Planned Transformation of the NATO-led ISAF Role and International Support; and (4) the Enduring Neutrality Vision.

Each program involves a number of activities and projects to be realized over a timeline of twelve years, starting from 2013 and finishing by the end of 2024, with anticipated overlaps of some short-term, medium-term, and long-term activities.

In actual and practical terms, the existing Policy Groups will be transformed into the Afghanistan Advocacy and Support Groups (AASG) with representation from Track I and Track II officials and experts whose leadership will then formulate the Regional Afghanistan Advocacy and Support Group (RAASG). This group will pursue and ensure the short-term, medium-term, and long-term objectives at the national and regional levels as outlined in detail in the Declaration.

The regional experts envisage a two-path strategy towards the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations made in this Declaration. Path one concerns all relevant Track I governments and organizations expected to work with the contents of the Declaration in the future. Path two is designed to be pursued by the existing regional Policy Groups in Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, and Pakistan, as well as their partner agencies and experts in China, Iran, Russia, and Turkey. The two paths may work independently, as well as in close coordination and across each other, at different intervals.